

Court rules in favour of Karoo group

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A PRETORIA judge yesterday ordered Mineral Resources Minister Susan Shabangu to supply anti-fracking lobby group Treasure the Karoo Action Group with an affidavit stating why the Department of Mineral Resources did not want to reveal details about a task team investigating the gas-extraction technique.

Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, would be used to extract gas from SA's large untapped shale gas resources, the world's fifth-largest — estimated by the International Energy Agency at 485-trillion cubic feet — under the ecologically sensitive Karoo.

The reserves became the subject of intense debate last year after it was revealed that petrochemical companies were keen to exploit them, in what is a global growth industry.

"We are greatly encouraged by our achievement," Treasure the Karoo chairman Jonathan Deal said yesterday.

Ms Shabangu has placed a moratorium on shale gas prospecting, due to last at least until the end of next month, in part to give the task force time to investigate fracking.

SA's resource plan for electricity has proposed that gas contribute up to 6% of SA's total electricity mix.

Treasure the Karoo's lawyer, Luke Havemann, said costs were

awarded against Ms Shabangu and her department.

The hearing, before Judge Ben du Plessis, took place in terms of the Promotion of Access to Information Act application rules.

The group wants, among other things, access to the terms of reference relating to research to be conducted by a task team Ms Shabangu established to investigate fracking, and the identities of those on the "working group" assisting the task team.

The team consists of the directors-general of the departments of mineral resources, science and technology, and trade and industry, and the CEO of the Petroleum Agency of SA, but no representatives of the departments of water affairs, environmental affairs or agriculture.

Department of Mineral Resources spokeswoman Zingaphi Jakuja said: "It is confirmed that the court application by Treasure the Karoo Action Group ... was postponed until month-end to allow the department to file its opposing affidavit."

Treasure the Karoo also wants to know the qualifications of those on the working group, the entities they represent, and to see all correspondence relating to the working group and the task team.

Further court applications would be made if the information received was unsatisfactory, or if the information was not received, Mr Havemann said.

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